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At a time when schools must adapt to rapid change in the social and economic structure of the community, educational leaders tend to insulate themselves from political reality. The educational leader is responsible for balancing the two forces of politics and change, which pull at the school's resources in opposite directions. He must develop political insight and judgment because of the rising costs of education and growing confrontations with parent dissatisfaction, teacher organizations, and student unrest. Other major social forces and developments modifying the traditional school-community relationship include: (1) The Federal Government's increasingly active role in public education, (2) continuing poverty in the midst of an affluent society, and (3) cybernation, with its resultant decreased dependency on human labor. Recent attempts by educational leaders to resolve problems of decentralization and racial integration illustrate the educational administrator's intrinsically political response to the influence of special interest groups and the changing relationship between the school and the community. (JK)

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"SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: THE NEED FOR A NEW RELATIONSHIP"

ADDRESS OF

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BEFORE THE

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I have heard it argued that the organizational chart of the typical American school system is reminiscent of the armies of Darius the Great. At the top of every school system there is an absolute despot, with all power delegated down from the top. Remove the despot and the structure collapses.

But this is not exactly the way it really is. The system is despotic only in principle. In fact, it is structured more like the palace of an Ottoman sultan. True, the Sultan was an absolute monarch; but his power was derived upward through an entrenched palace guard. If the political necessities of the day required occasional regicide, the palace functionaries continued to maintain a firm grip on the empire.

The sultans of Turkey were deliberately insulated from the realities outside the palace walls. When a revolt or a coup took place, the sultans were always the last to know. They were, in a sense, apolitical; although their power rested on a firm political base.

While there are flaws in this example, I believe it does point to some obvious parallels with the American educational system. Those at the top of the educational structure do tend to remain insulated from political reality. Traditionally, education in America has disdained involvement in the machinery and process of government, although it is through that process that education derives its greatest support.

In our striving to keep out of politics, we educators have frequently built islands in our culture not unlike the Sultan's palace--honest, decent islands, to be sure, but often lacking relevance to the real world around them.

Pursuing their supposedly pure and separate courses, big city school boards (with some exceptions) are still erecting fortresses in the slums--great defensive buildings which turn a blank wall to a frequently hostile community.

But education is a subsystem of government. The schools must live with City Hall and learn to like it. At the same time, they are sometimes called upon to adapt to rapid change in the social and economic structure of the community. Frequently, these two forces--politics and change--pull at the resources of the schools in opposite directions. The point of my address to you today is to attempt to place these opposing forces in perspective, and to focus attention to the role of the educator in striking a balance between them.

The role of the contemporary educational administrator is a complex one. Observers of educational leadership, and some of its thoughtful practitioners, conclude that its greatest prerequisites are money, public confidence and research-grounded wisdom. Few, however, note the demands made upon the school administrator for sophisticated political insight, sure-footedness and judgment. Yet the basic interrelationship between the school and the community today makes it mandatory that the educational leader have a high degree of political artfulness.

Let me lay out what I believe to be the two essential reasons why educators must acquire these basic political skills:

First, the costs of education are rising and will continue to do so for some time, even though there is some indication now that the post-war population boom is leveling off. The projected cost increase will not be due solely to inflation--increased demands for specialized forms of education, technical progress and the growing use of sophisticated educational tools all will contribute to rising pressures on the educational dollar. As these pressures increase, education is going to encounter increasing competition for the public's money from such sectors as health and welfare, defense and the

space program.

The second element--and the most important from the standpoint of the school administrator's ability or willingness to adapt to changing times--is what has been described as the politics of confrontation. This new politics has begun to manifest itself in the schools in three ways: Through the demands of parents and other members of the community for a greater say in how the schools are run, through the demands of increasingly militant and well-organized teachers, and through growing unrest among students. It all adds up to the fact that more people are now demanding a piece of the action. More people now see such a crucial stake in education that they are determined to be heard above the quiet, insulated voice of authority vested in the professional school leaders.

This confrontation is the biggest single fact of life in the schools today. The great issue in American education is not academic, but political.

The emerging demands for community control are rooted in two basic factors: One is that there is a strong public feeling that many school systems, especially in the big cities, are too rooted in bureaucracy, too beholden to the prevailing political power structure and too hidebound by pedagogic tradition to respond to demands for quality education. The second point is the growing dissatisfaction of parents over the education their children receive, especially in the urban ghettos.

People in many of the ghetto communities feel a strong need for a greater voice in decisions affecting education, and in New Jersey we are now attempting to design a model, built around the Follow Through program, for a collective educational partnership which integrates the efforts of family, community and school. There is really nothing new in this concept, except that in actual practice the parent-community-school team approach has been infrequently tried. Parents need to play a useful, viable role, yet even educators committed to this idea sometimes experience difficulty in defining what this role should be.

Particularly in high poverty areas, the present system of education has proved grossly inadequate. The problem is greatly magnified by the hostility of many ghetto residents toward established institutions, including the school. It follows that a basic strategy for improving the public school systems in the urban centers should be the creation of expanded opportunities for parent and community involvement. Nowhere are such opportunities for community involvement more available than in the Head Start and Follow Through programs. Yet very little is being accomplished in this direction. Only two of the 80 Follow Through school districts across the nation have selected the "parent-implemented model" from among the program variations available. Part of the problem may be that there is apparently no workable conceptual framework for a parent-implemented Follow Through program with recommendations for desirable minimum and maximum levels of involvement. Through the New Jersey model, it is hoped that we can develop such standards.

But whether or not a successful model is constructed, it still remains clear that the demand for community involvement in the schools is so great-- and continues to grow at such a fast pace--that educators must begin to accommodate it.

The demand for direct community involvement is relatively new and still relatively undefined; thus we are all poorly equipped to respond to it or cope with it. But we can, at least, observe the unhappy experience of New York City and perhaps profit by it. Not so long ago, James Lloyd, a school official from Los Angeles, took a field trip to New York to observe first-hand the experiences that embattled city has encountered with school decentralization. "If we don't learn from the experiences here," he observed, "I'm afraid we'll all stew in New York's juice."

I do not want to overlook the role of youth in the process of educational fermentation. This postwar generation is quite unlike any other. As societal values have changed, so have the values of youth.

This is the first generation in the history of mankind that faces total annihilation, and this awesome fact of history has had a crushing effect upon the minds of the young. Also, the strong influence played upon the lives of today's students by mass communication and the dehumanizing effect of industrialization and the new technology have wrought profound changes in youth. Students today are considerably more nihilistic and independent than previous generations, and they demonstrate less confidence in our ability to serve them.

Let me briefly sketch out some of the other major social forces and developments which are drastically modifying the traditional relationships of school and community.

First is the changed role of the Federal government toward public education. Like a clumsy, powerful giant, our government has left untouched, in recent years, hardly any aspect of the traditional interrelationships of school and community. The increasing urbanization of our population has created problems which local communities and the State and Federal governments did not anticipate and which have resisted most attempts to solve.

Public recognition of the shaming condition of poverty in our affluent society has sorely affected our collective consciences and literally paralyzed our ability to act. The human rights movement against institutionalized cruelty and inhumanity to black Americans has generated mortal terror among many Americans.

Then there is the cybernation process which promises increased productivity with decreased dependency upon human labor, entailing, as it does, reorganization of the fundamental nature of our economic and social life. The dehumanization inherent

in such technical change has the potential for weakening such values as individual liberty, the democratic process and a community-based society.

No community in this country can escape the spin-out of these major societal forces and processes; at best it can merely delay confrontation. Sooner or later the school system in each community must respond to the consequences of each one of the largely arbitrary, impersonal social forces which I have outlined. One common way that these communities will attempt to maintain their collective sanity will be to leave such management mainly to their educational leaders.

Conspicuous among the ways the typical educational administrator tends to his school business is to engage almost exclusively with special interest groups. The enormity of the problem is such that an institutionalized structure has been created and called, usually, "the educational lobby." The variety and diversity of this countervailing structure is great. It is usually composed of governmental agencies on local, state, and federal levels; education associations; professional associations; civil rights groups; religious interests; business and industrial groups and labor organizations. It is important here to note the variation in influence among members of the lobby and the diversity of opinion, concern and interest they have in educational policies and programs. It is also important to note those members of the community not represented.

The dominant mode developed by educational administrators to deal with special interest groups is intrinsically political. That is, these groups bargain, compromise, negotiate, influence, educate, persuade, deceive, corrupt and overwhelm with force. Frequently, the administrator replies in kind. I don't believe we need to place a value judgement upon this mode of operation. But we should understand it for what it is, and learn how such involvements affect the relationship of school and community.

Many concrete examples can be presented to illustrate the dilemmas and alternatives facing school administrators that compel them to engage in the politics of education. A current issue is the emergence of negotiated adversary relationships between professional educational groups and other organizations. The process of legislated or negotiated policy with special interest groups maximizes power confrontations and may adversely affect the educational plans and programs of a community. A case in point is the convulsive dispute over decentralization in New York City, but it is by no means unique.

In New Jersey, the Department of Education is confronted by a similar, if less dramatic, clash of interests. Several years ago the Newark Board of Education worked out an agreement with the local teachers association which stipulated promotional procedures. But last year, after the City of Newark was convulsed by racial disturbances on a large scale, the Board of Education decided to bypass several faculty members who were in line for promotion and appointed, instead, a number of principals who were more acceptable to the black community. Although this action has caused a deep rift in the traditional cordial relations between leaders of the teachers and the school board, it is credited with having kept the lid on Newark's simmering racial pot. It is a textbook example of one of many questions about community relationships that school administrators must address themselves to.

Does the educational administrator engage in democratic dialogue with citizens before introducing major policy decisions, or do what is "necessary and right" in spite of the popular voice to the contrary?

Does the educational leader seek increased federal support with the attendant possibility of abdication of local control and responsibility?

Should he act with vigor to achieve racially balanced schools and risk losing the mobile and favored middle class population?

Should he support increased taxes to gain educational excellence and thereby drive out the commerce, industry and residents directly paying most of the costs of education?

Can the thoughtful educational administrator advocate and implement a federally supported research and development program such as Follow Through--designed to increase the opportunities for total development of disadvantaged children--when the effects of such a program on the families of the children are unknown? This question gets directly to the seldom reflected upon issue of the various forms of relationship of school and community. For it is clear that the way in which educational programs are conceptualized and implemented affect societal units beyond the mere individual child. Agreement would be easy to obtain that in our way of life the social unit of the family should be supported and strengthened. Programs which, intentionally or unintentionally tend to disrupt and destroy the unity of family organization and function would be adjudged as undesirable. Yet who measures or knows about the extent to which family and parental rules , responsibilities and duties are made dysfunctional by educational programs designed with all good intentions of assisting selected categories of children. Do these effects out weigh the pay-offs expected in the target children? Knowledge and insight must be secured about these possible consequences of experimental educational programs to fundamental societal units and roles. Illustratively I only call your attention to the alleged impact of our welfare programs upon the black family and, in particular, the roles of the black male. Speculation is not sufficient; researchers in education have a responsibility to provide educational administrators with knowledge.

Any speculation about the process of restructuring school and community relationships is dependent upon what the future will be like. It is obvious that the present structure is not effective, either because of the massive social forces which I have outlined or because of the ambiguous role of the educator as politician. But

one broad consequence of the future is clear: Mass education and mass communication are pushing us toward direct, participatory democracy in the schools.

The educational administrator is forced to become a political being because the present decision-making process is pluralistic and not really responsive to ideal standards of planning, balance, purpose or priority. He must, nevertheless, lead in the solving of volatile social issues such as economic and racial aristocracy, religious bigotry and injustice and federal control as they militate against the educational system.

Mark Twain observed that "every man is a suffering-machine and a happiness-machine combined." In the final analysis, it may be that this is the best that can be said about the future role of the school administrator. He need not become all things to all people, but it <u>will</u> become necessary for him to strike a reasonable balance between suffering and happiness--or between city hall and the public.